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Inter-American Border Discourses, Heterotopia, And Translocal Communities In Courtney Hunt's Film *Frozen River*

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ABSTRACT

This essay discusses the multifaceted and symbolic representations of border and borderlands in Courtney Hunt's debut film *Frozen River* (2008). Using Foucault's concept of heterotopia as the point of departure, the article discusses the borderlands of Mohawk territory between the U.S. and Canada as progressive spaces and contact zones where levels of individual and psychological borders intersect with the geopolitical border, marked by two nations and an autonomous Mohawk reserve, in their impact on translocal community building. In particular, it focuses on the development of the relationship between the film's two female protagonists as a reflection on shifting border discourses in times of global migration and on how individual fates are inextricably linked within local transboundary culture and its political and cultural processes.

Key words: border, *heterotopia*, mobility, agency, transethnic, translocal

RESUMEN

Este ensayo discute las multifacéticas y simbólicas representaciones de la frontera y las tierras fronterizas que se presentan en la ópera prima de Courtney Hunt, *Frozen River* (2008). Utilizando el concepto de Foucault 'heterotopía', el artículo aborda el tema de las tierras mohawk en la frontera entre Estados Unidos y Canadá como espacios progresivos y zonas de contacto, donde distintos niveles de fronteras individuales y psicológicas se intersectan con la frontera geopolítica, marcada por dos naciones y la reservación autónoma mohawk, en su impacto sobre la construcción de una comunidad translocal. En particular, se enfoca en el desarrollo de la relación entre las dos protagonistas femeninas de la película, que es un reflejo de los cambiantes discursos en una época de migración global, y de cómo los destinos individuales están inevitablemente ligados a la cultura local transfronteriza.

Palabras clave: frontera, *heterotopía*, movilidad, gestión, transétnico, translocal

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Landscape constitutes a discourse through which identifiable social groups historically have framed themselves and their relations both with the land and with other human groups, and that this discourse is closely related epistemically and technically to ways of seeing.

DENIS E. COSGROVE

Unlike simple geographical locations, which exist objectively, places do not exist until they are verbalized, first in thought and memory and then through the spoken and written word. Only when they have coalesced in the mind and then achieved narrative expression can places have more than an idiosyncratic private existence. Only when place has achieved verbal expression, in turn, can it have any sort of permanence and its meaning remain secure.

KENT C. RYDEN

Courtney Hunt's film *Frozen River* (2008) eloquently dramatizes human relationships on the border between Canada and the United States. By choosing the St. Lawrence River as trope to reflect upon psychological as well as geopolitical borders and to unfold the human potential to overcome them, Courtney Hunt turns our attention away from the highly medialized border between Mexico and the U.S. to represent the complex intersection of global migration and human bonding in the very north of the Americas. Drawing upon Foucault's conception of heterotopia and reading it through Massey's concept of progressive space (1994), this article aims at exploring the river in Mohawk territory as a site where utopia and heterotopia potentially meet, as a border both static and fluid, where the psychological, the legal, and the geopolitical intersect. By doing so, the author hopes this essay will expand the work on the U.S.-Canadian border by social scientists like Brunet-Jailly from an inter-American studies perspective focusing on the cultural and social processes within U.S.-Canadian borderlands. While Brunet-Jailly and Alper touch on the realm of local transboundary culture, they do not fully capture the complexity of interrelated contact zones and their impact on the dynamics and tensions of human interaction in those border regions.

Overall border discourses have been making a tremendous impact on the fields of cultural, migration, and media studies in the context of globalization and its scholarly investigation since the spatial turn in the 1990s. The 1990s demonstrated

renewed interest in issues of space and place across the social sciences. With respect to the Americas, a major focus has been placed on the U.S.-Mexican border both for theorizing about it (Anzaldúa, 1987) and for analyzing its transcultural and political dimension (Saldívar, 1997). Recently, though, the U.S.-Canadian border has caught the attention of critics due to intensified processes of border crossings and new forms of community building there (Tomblin and Colgan, 2004) (See Brunet-Jailly, 2008; and Brunet-Jailly and Smith, 2008).

In general criticism thus addresses the massive inter-American migration which produces profound demographic changes both North and South and an increasing diversity of translocal and transnational communities with growing political and economic influence both in the host and the home countries. In the early stages of modernity, the notion of living together in society was determined, and thus, enclosed, by the imagined community of the nation (Anderson, 1991). The nation itself was defined here as a territory, a conception that circumscribed the collective identity within spatial borders. Such a paradigm naturalized separation from the outside and limited the possibility of exchange and dialogue. The contemporary period, however, is associated with the paradigm of the transnational and the transcultural. Social processes of globalization further the deconstruction of spatial borders and territories. Within these transformations, paradoxical notions of living together may develop. You do not have to live in the same place to live together. On the other hand, existence in the same place does not necessarily signify living together. As a result of these relocations, systems of values are juxtaposed, questioned, and qualified. In an ever more globalized space that suggests borderless multiplicities without unity, cultural differences and conflicts of values seem omnipresent. The ubiquity of the transnational and transcultural is displayed in the sphere of the everyday. TV, internet, and cinema have turned the transnational into an integral part of our everyday life. While these aspects of globalization gain general acceptance, others, like human trafficking, and the drug and weapons trades, create tensions and contradictions that are worldwide in scale. They penetrate the lives of communities and individuals alike (Raussert and Isensee, 2008: 2).

One of the most significant phenomena within global movement is the massive inter-American migration that produces profound demographic changes both North and South and a host of translocal and transnational communities with growing political and economic influence both in the host and in the home countries. Globalized post-Fordism with its free flow of capital, mobile production sites, transnationally-organized lean production, and immaterial labor also has profound repercussions on the livelihoods of the working population both North and South and brings to bear the organization of labor struggle on a transnational basis. Taking into account

what Benedict Anderson says about the close relationship between the imagined communities and the dominant media at the time of nation founding at the beginning of the nineteenth century, questions arise about how the political semantics of migration and integration produce narrations of new regional and transnational “inter-American” identities or “imagined communities” and how these collective identities will be shaped by the dominance of new media including film in the contemporary age of visualization.¹



In recent Hollywood investigations in the borderlands, the previous presentation of the frontier as a clear dividing line has given way to more complex discourse strategies. Saldívar’s transfrontera contact zone resulting from migration and intercultural dynamics has become a key trope to the understanding of the diasporic human condition in contemporary societies (1997). As critics like Greenblatt (1995) and Clifford (1997) have pointed out, geographical as well as social mobility lead to new spatial contact zones for identity formation; routes increasingly replace roots in the attempt to define one’s positionality in a fast-paced world of globalization and digital mediaization. Experiences of dislocation and relocation infuse everyday life for more and more individuals as mo-

bility accelerates. Hence, it is no surprise that the border also becomes a key trope in filmmakers’ aesthetic reflections upon experiences of liminality and deterritorialization in recent films like *Bordertown Café*, *Bordertown*, *Babel*, *Traffic*, *Crash*, *Al otro lado* (On the Other Side), *The Burials of Melquiades Estrada*, and *Frozen River*. The latter, the film debut of Courtney Hunt, was released in 2008 and awarded a Grand Jury Prize for Dramatic Filmmaking at the 2008 Sundance Festival, the U.S.’s largest independent cinema festival.

Courtney Hunt’s film *Frozen River* narrates, dramatizes, and visualizes a series of border crossings between Canada and the U.S.² Here, we encounter a dramatic plot emerging from a tension-driven juxtaposition of indigenous traditions in the border-free Mohawk territory and the geopolitically defined territories of the U.S. and Canadian nation-states. The film reflects upon illegal immigration along the

¹ I refer here to comments by Sebastian Thies and Josef Raab in their as yet unpublished opening lecture to *E Pluribus Unum* at the Zif in Bielefeld in October 2009.

² Courtney Hunt, *Frozen River*, USA/Canada, 2008, 93 minutes.

Canadian-U.S. American border by telling the story of two hardened single mothers struggling to survive by trafficking immigrants from Canada into the U.S. through Mohawk territory. Poor, white, working-class Ray Eddy is a clerk struggling to raise two sons with her husband, a compulsive gambler, who has disappeared with the funds she had put aside to finance the purchase of a mobile home. While searching for him, she encounters Lila Littlewolf, a single mother and Mohawk bingo parlor employee who is trying to resolve her financial problems and regain custody over her child. At the time of their first meeting, Lila is driving Ray Eddy's husband's car, which she claims to have found abandoned with the keys in the ignition at the local bus station. After a first violent clash about the ownership of the car, the two women, equally trapped in difficult financial situations, form a tension-driven economic alliance and start trafficking illegal immigrants from Canada into the United States across the frozen St. Lawrence River. Because the women's route takes them through an in-between space, from an Indian reservation in the U.S. to an Indian reserve in Canada, they hope to avoid detection by local law enforcement.

Hunt's choice of location illustrates the complex spatial configuration that infuses the plot. The film is set in the North County of Upstate New York, near the Akwesasne St. Regis Mohawk Reservation and the Canadian border. The Mohawk reservation is adjacent to the Akwesasne reserve in Ontario and Quebec. Under the terms of the 1794 Jay Treaty, the Mohawk population may freely cross the international boundary separating the United States from Canada. The Mohawk tribe regards the reservation as a "sovereign nation," despite the fact that it shares jurisdiction with the State of New York, the United States of America, and the Town of Bombay, where it is located. Geographically, the two parts of the reservation are separated by the St. Lawrence River, and in terms of traffic, by the 45th parallel, both prominently present in the border crossing scenes of *Frozen River*. Hunt refers to both the geopolitical and legal position of the Mohawk reservation when she develops her narrative at the intersection of tribal, regional, and national borders and when she places her female protagonists in a complex web of legal and spatial conflicts and contradictions.

INTER-AMERICAN STUDIES, TRANSCULTURALITY, AND BORDERS IN *FROZEN RIVER*

I will embed my analysis of the film in an inter-American research paradigm. The call for inter-American studies comes at a time when both American Studies and Latin American Studies show signs of tremendous change as manifested in the turn to Post-American Studies (Donald Pease, Amy Kaplan, John Carlos Rowe) and the debates

on the supposed end of the “*estudios culturales latinoamericanos*” (Latin American cultural studies) (Walter Dignolo, Daniel Mato, George Yúdice) at the 2003 Latin American Studies Association (LASA) conference. In my understanding of “inter-American,” the term signals a scholarly investigation into dynamics and tensions characterizing processes of cultural encounter, clash, and exchange in the Americas in a relational way. “Inter-American” refers to a transcultural imaginary that suggests multiple interconnectedness and hence requires dialogic models of investigation. Parameters of the studies of national cultures need to be readjusted to parameters of progressive, overlapping, intersecting spaces. Within such approaches the relations between cultural production, distribution, and reception in the Americas have to be viewed from a transcultural perspective beyond the notion of separate and distinct national cultures.

A dialogical, contextualizing, and performative use of theory in transcultural Inter-American Studies enables us “to understand contact, translation, exchange, negotiation, conflict, and other dynamics that attend the constitution of social relationships across cultural and national borders” (Ngai, 2005: 60). Furthermore, it puts us into a position to resort to, expand, and critically apply the recent theoretical work done in “postnationalist American Studies” (John Carlos Rowe, Donald E. Pease), on the dialogics of transnational American Culture Studies (Günter H. Lenz), and on notions of transdifference (Helmbrecht Breinig) as well as on concepts of a transgressive transnationalism (Rüdiger Kunow).

“Transculturality” as a theoretical model appears useful for capturing and analyzing the dialogics of cultural contacts within the Americas and within their transatlantic connections. I read “transculturality” as a theory of literary and cultural identity construction, as they emerge within an increasingly interconnected globalized world. My approach then places border discourses in the Americas in a transcultural imaginary. “Transculturality” as a critique provides a broad range of analytical possibilities. Methodologically, it allows for the critical deconstruction of nationalist conceptions of an American identity that reduce racial, ethnic, and gender differences by re-inscribing a closed and homogeneous space of the American nation based on ideas of essence and bonding. In addition, “transculturality” expands our critical vocabulary to explore contact zones and differences among and within regions, areas, and nations. Questioning the notion of closed national spaces, transcultural perspectives help us explore the United States and the Americas at large as variously interconnected with other continents within historical processes of migration as well as contemporary processes of globalization.

The film *Frozen River* opens up a series of perspectives for conceiving borders as multidimensional in the context of human relationships, legal jurisdiction, and geopolitical power. Drawing upon Foucault’s conception of heterotopia and reading

it through Massey's concept of progressive space (1994), I want to explore the river in Mohawk territory as a site in which utopia and heterotopia potentially meet. As the various camera shots of the river and Lila's and Ray's conflicting narrations about the river illustrate, the border needs to be seen as both static and fluid and as a border where the psychological, the legal, and the geopolitical intersect. The camera technique frequently shifts between close-ups of the protagonists' faces reminiscent of Dorothea Lang's photographs of migrants in the 1930s and images of the borderlands interweaving the grayness of the landscape with the harsh living conditions of two single mothers. The film's synergetic effects of camera technique, narrative structure, and multidimensional conceptions of border permit us to read one of its major subtexts within the issue of illegal immigration: the psychological depth of the human struggle to overcome demarcation, separation, and isolation in the context of economically enforced and politically controlled mobility.

Frozen River opens with a powerful visualization of landscape. Right at the beginning the viewer is presented an all-encompassing image of landscape in New York State close to the Canadian border. Although it is winter and the landscape is covered with snow and ice, the viewer encounters grayness. The snow's grayness reflects the grey sky above. With such an opening earth and sky are hardly separable as both are dressed in grayish white. A borderline between the two is visually dismantled, as the camera shots create a vision blurring earth and sky. Right from the start the camera focus on the frozen river as the border introduces a visually complex and ambivalent trope. The river represents both a natural and a geopolitically constructed border. However, in its visualization as "frozen river," it paradoxically becomes a white open pathway and landscape, thus a space for both mobility and vista (see Image 1). As "frozen river," the border equals a mobile and changeable signifier. This becomes most evident when the female protagonists present different positions on how to read the border. For the poor white woman, Ray, the border is part of a national imaginary and represents the dividing line between two nation states, namely the U.S. and Canada. She is also the one who points out the presence of border patrol cars and border lines when traveling the 45th parallel. The Mohawk woman, Lila, in contrast, holds on to an indigenous imaginary of borderless territory, as for her the Mohawk territory spreads on both sides of the river. Lila's position draws upon the indigenous imaginary of borderless space and, to her, the Mohawk territory stretches into all surrounding national spaces. Such a conception of space also functions as a means of legitimizing human trafficking between Canada and the U.S. Where there are no borders, no law can be broken. The natural border has literally turned into a frozen pathway for border crossing and a geopolitical border literally vanishes in Lila's conception of Mohawk territory.



HETEROTOPIA AND A PROGRESSIVE SENSE OF PLACE: VISUALIZATIONS OF SPACES BEYOND

As Foucault points out in “Of Other Spaces,” “our epoch is one in which space takes for us the form of relations among sites” (1986: 2). Within this conception of space, Foucault defines heterotopias as counter-sites in which all real sites “that can be found within culture are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted” (1986: 2-3). The Mohawk territory in *Frozen River* unambiguously represents heterotopia in a Foucaultian sense, because it functions as a counter-site in which spatial concepts of border and nation-state are not only mirrored but challenged at the same time. As Foucault explains, “heterotopias always presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable” (1986: 5). Again this is mirrored by the Mohawk territory that is at once separated from the nation-states of Canada and the United States and yet functions as a pathway for immigrants to cross the border. While Foucault’s basic concept turns space into a grid in which various sites are linked, it does not provide a paradigm to account for mobility within space. Yet border crossings infuse the plot as well as the visualization of space in *Frozen River*. Foucault’s concept of heterotopia takes on a slightly broadened notion when reinterpreted in the context of Doreen Massey’s progressive sense of place. In summary, Massey states that “places are processes ... [they] do not have boundaries ... [they] do not have single, unique identities; they are full of internal conflicts.... The specificity of space is continually reproduced, but it’s not a specificity which results from some long inter-

nalized history" (1994: 155). Massey removes place from geography, bounding it instead discursively, within consciousness rather than physical borders. (This becomes important when we think of the mental borders that separate individual lives in the story of the film.) In such a reading the site of heterotopia represents a localized place that is never static and is always characterized by an ongoing process. In order to enter into a heterotopic state, a particular locus must be subject to a break from reality. This site is one of disjunction, juxtaposing spaces/discourses that are not compatible or harmonious and are also frequently the outcome of a cognitive process.

The Mohawk territory turns into an in-between space, a third space, in which, according to concepts by Bhabha, processes of transformation occur and often result in hybrid manifestations of identity and culture. Hybridized spaces are omnipresent in the shifting demographics of actual nations, produced, as Bhabha puts it, by "the wandering peoples who...are themselves the marks of a shifting boundary that alienates the frontiers of the modern Nation (1990: 315). Bhabha's critical trope of a space beyond provides us with a transcultural imaginary projecting cultural contact zones as matrix for change. Within a space where cultures clash and overlap, new translocal and transnational concepts of identity formation may emerge. As we watch the film's initial scenes, we are confronted with images of national borders in an orthodox sense. We encounter camera shots of fences, barbed wire, and signs announcing the national border separating the United States from Canada (see Image 2).



And we see cars and trucks slowing down as they approach the border on their way to the United States. The movement depicted in the opening scene is linear, suggesting the controlled border crossing from one nation into another. When we look at border crossings that take place within Mohawk territory, we encounter more complex multi-directional or zigzag movements marked by tracks and paths instead of roads. Not only do Ray Eddy and Lila Littlewolf move back and forth across the borderline that runs through Mohawk territory, but their cross-border mobility is also marked by sudden stops, intersections, and returns. Two crucial scenes in *Frozen River* come to mind immediately. Both eventually signify a shift from self-interest to a concern with the other. A process of self-reflection sets in as Ray and Lila begin to see the violent and life-threatening hazards involved in human trafficking while they are helping a Pakistani immigrant couple cross the border at nighttime. Ray Eddy unknowingly drops a bag with the couple's baby in the snow of Mohawk territory because she is afraid the bag may contain a bomb. Hunt explicitly refers to U.S. paranoia after September 11 and connects the fear of immigrants with the fear of terrorism in this scene. Facing the desperate Pakistani parents after having successfully crossed the border, the two women return to search for the lost bag in the borderlands. They eventually succeed by following the tracks in the snow, and the scene concludes with the child returning to life and being delivered to his parents once again.

A second instance of stop and return occurs when Ray Eddy decides to get back to Lila Littlewolf's trailer after having been pursued by the border patrol during their last human trafficking journey. Hunt visualizes this scene again as a nighttime border crossing. In the film's narration and visualization of the border the Mohawk territory not only stands for a separate but also a permeable space that represents a contact zone, permits transgression, and calls for negotiation. The river running through it suggests fluidity, flux, and permeability. In its frozen state, it turns into gateway to the promised land for migrants, but on a metaphorical level its frozen nature equals the cold and businesslike relationship between individuals in the film's opening scenes. The border's visual appearance becomes even more vague and blurred with the camera shifts from daylight to nighttime –clearly the film plays with the notion of visible and invisible borders– and the border's material substance is presented as always in process and bound to change from ice to water and back again. Hence, it appears as a logical consequence of the film's narrative that Ray Eddy's final moment of catharsis, in which she recognizes Lila Littlewolf not only as the other but also as an individual she needs to think and worry about, takes place in Mohawk territory: a third space with potential for change and new beginnings.

Ray Eddy's and Lila Littlewolf's final journey in the trafficking business turns into a catastrophe as they are discovered and pursued by the border patrol. They seek

refuge on the Indian reservation, yet the legal negotiations between the reservation and national law require the sacrifice of one of the accused. While Ray initially prefers her own freedom and runs away into the darkness, she becomes aware that the punishment would be life-ruining for an ethnically marginalized person like Lila; Lila would be expelled from the Mohawk community, whereas for her it would only mean a short prison sentence. It is then that Ray Eddy makes the decision to return to Lila's trailer, to face police and court, and to go to prison for Lila instead. What occurs in the third space of the Mohawk territory is a brief realization of utopia. What Courtney Hunt's film presents is a spatialization of utopia that we increasingly encounter in recent criticism as well as cultural production, as Winfried Fluck reminds us in his reflection on resistance in recent American Studies:

For some time, American Studies put all hopes for resistance on marginalized groups and ethnic subcultures, until the critique of essentialism destroyed the equation of disenfranchised minority groups with resistance and left only the idea of a negating potential of flexible, multiple identities. All of this is the result of an increasingly radical and sweeping power analysis. If systematic power is all-pervasive, the hope for resistance can only be placed in the margins of that system, and even if the margins can no longer possess a quasi inbuilt oppositional, then only a flexible identity can function as a resort of last hope. This new utopia is often space- or territory-based, for example in the emphasis on border zones, diasporas, or intermediate spaces, because, as the argument goes, such spaces force their inhabitants to adopt several identities and thus seem ideally suited to create models of resistance. (2006: 70)

As Fluck's commentaries suggest, Hunt's creation of a third space with shifting affiliations goes hand in hand with recent replacements of utopian spaces. In Hunt's film, these shifts are also connected to changes of time. Camera nighttime shots make borders literally invisible. This effect ties in with the overall technique of presenting the landscape on the U.S. and the Canadian sides as changing same. In both cases we encounter a winter landscape with run-down trailer homes and junkyards covered in grayish snow, underscoring that both zones are ruled by poverty. The camera light never blurs or softens images of the winter landscape. Nor does the darkness projected in these scenes lead to effects of over-dramatization. What the camera effects achieve, though, is to narrate border crossings as both spatial and mental movements oscillating between light and dark.

A space beyond –to borrow from Bhabha again– unfolds its potential for change precisely in night scenes that create a temporary sense of alternative reality reminiscent of what Baudrillard labels "the hyperreal" (1978: 62). As the latter puts it, the

hyperreality denotes a step in the historical process whereby images have become unshackled from the real. The last of these steps is “the hyperreal, a state whereby films are not maps, doubles, or mirrors of any domain regarded as ‘the real’ but visions of a world [that] appears more legitimate, more believable, and more valuable than the real” (Hughes-Warrington, 2007: 103). Within such moments of the hyperreal, the utopian element enters the narrative. Human borders are transgressed and Ray Eddy decides to sacrifice her freedom to protect Lila’s future existence. To make it clear, I do not want to suggest that Hunt’s film produces hyperreality as such; far from it. But the camera technique that provides night scene close-ups of Ray Eddy shifts the focus from light to darkness, from exterior to interior, from body to mind. Such scenes mark a re-evaluation of values and infuse the grim reality of the women’s and migrants’ existence with glimpses of hope.

As these scenes illustrate, border crossings –to return to Massey’s conception of sites embedded in consciousness rather than geography– also have a psychological dimension in *Frozen River*. As the different conceptions of border show, they are part of collective memory as well as of individual differences. Where Ray sees a border, Lila sees none. Both women eventually engage in various processes of border crossings that have geographical, legal, psychological, and emotional implications. Initially their interaction is determined by a struggle to access mobility symbolized by Ray Eddy’s missing husband’s car. Mobility can be understood in spatial as well as social terms. Both women are at the bottom of their respective societies and both struggle to survive economically. The car, then, is not only the means to cross the border but also the vehicle to smuggle illegal immigrants across the border and the means of transportation needed to improve living conditions by partaking in human trade and human trafficking. What we witness in the film is a series of border crossings that also shape and characterize the relationship between the two female protagonists. In summary, the women move from violent confrontation to interaction based on economic necessity to a socially conscious and finally an emotionally caring relationship. On a personal and psychological level, they cross various thresholds to create bonding with larger social implications, as the final camera shots of an emerging temporary patchwork family suggest.

BORDERS AND CONTACT ZONES IN A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Diachronic and synchronic perspectives on borders fuse in Courtney Hunt’s *Frozen River*. Diachronically, the film recalls the contact zones of colonial encounters between

indigenous peoples and European settlers in the Americas. In *Imperial Eyes*, a study on travel writing in colonial and postcolonial situations, Mary Louise Pratt defines the concept of contact zones as “space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict” (1992: 6). Cultural contact in both contexts draws upon one of the founding myths of post-medieval Western culture: the first encounter between two cultures represented by European discoverers and the inhabitants of a completely new world. Adopted from linguistics, the term “contact” derives from a spatial metaphor that conceives cultures as fairly homogeneous linguistic and cultural systems whose homogeneity is imperiled by the triple chronotope of encounter, conquest, and discovery and succumbs to ongoing processes of transculturation. It focuses the interactive processes of understanding and everyday practice, conceiving colonizer and colonized, traveler and “travelee” both as subjects. Ray Eddy’s and Lila Littlewolf’s initial encounter precisely re-stages such early colonial encounters in the context of contemporary migration and immigration. Moreover scenes in which the walls of Ray Eddy’s and Lila Littlewolf’s trailer homes are threatened by bullets and fire recall images of violent encounters in the conquest of the Americas.

As the changing paradigm of interaction between the two female protagonists demonstrates, the Mohawk territory and its surroundings are “contested spaces” in that they represent geographic locations “where conflicts in the form of opposition, confrontation, subversion, and/or resistance engage actors whose social positions are defined by differential of resources and access to power” (Low and Lawrence-Zuniga, 2003: 18). Both Ray and Lila can be seen as agents with shifting degrees of power. Their access to power is clearly linked to place. The film narrates moments of shifting agency not only through the women’s struggle to gain access to mobility—namely the car—but also through the control over the other through the possession of the pistol. Ray and Lila manage to get a hold of the pistol in different symbolic places. Inside Mohawk territory Lila is in the position of power which is symbolically expressed by her forcing Ray to drive the car to a hidden spot where illegal immigrants are traded for money and waiting for transfer across the border. Thus, Lila literally forces Ray to get involved in the global human trafficking trade. Once they cross the border and enter U.S. territory Ray succeeds in gaining possession of the weapon and control over the situation. Now she controls the car as symbolical contested space and decides which way they will take. The car as a mobile spatial entity also signifies larger geopolitical territories. As Low and Lawrence-Zuniga point out, “spaces are contested precisely because they concretize the fundamental and recurring, but otherwise unexamined, ideological and social frameworks that structure practice”

(2003: 18). The illegal transactions in the context of human trade not only reflect on the current global phenomenon of multiple migrations. By portraying illegal transactions from the perspective of the female protagonist, the film's narration of border, space, and place challenges long held cultural imaginaries of territory. Once again the frozen river as border figures as a multiple signifier. On the one hand, it riffs on cold and distant human relationships across all boundaries; on the other hand, it symbolizes potential fluidity, as the St. Lawrence River returns from ice to water at one point and also functions as a crossable border. Clearly Courtney Hunt's film challenges any territorialization of space linking closed territories such as mobile homes, nation-state, and reservations to states of isolation and exclusion.

Synchronically, the film refers to human trafficking in contemporary times of globalization, as Ray and Lila eventually cooperate in smuggling migrants from India, Pakistan, and China between Canada and the United States of America. Since both female protagonists are at the very bottom of their society's respective social strata, they are also economically linked to the homeless immigrants from China, India, and Pakistan. Spatially as well, Ray and Lila are associated with images of nomads and homeless people for both live in run-down trailer homes. *Frozen River* spatially as well as temporally traverses different border discourses, and, by synthesizing diachronic and synchronic perspectives on the ramifications of border crossings, makes us aware that spatial conceptions cannot be separated from time. The spatial turn in the 1990s affirms Foucault's claim that "the present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space" (1986: 22). Yet, while many theorists have come to argue that "today ... it may be more space than time that hides consequences from us, 'the making of geography' more than the 'making of history' that provides the most revealing tactical and theoretical world" (Soja, 1989: 1), Hunt's film reintroduces the temporal into the spatial, as the coexistence of diachronic and synchronic perspectives in *Frozen River* illustrate. Shifts in perception of place are linked to the changes of time from day to night. Finally, the scene in which the Pakistani couple's baby comes back to life recalls the overall temporal setting of the film around Christmastime, which underscores that border crossings are also mythically and historically linked to new beginnings.

The film closes with camera shots that return the spectator to the opening scenes. We encounter again a similar view to the one we had witnessed before, of a blue hole in the sky above the road connecting the U.S. and Canada. We also return to a shot of a truck carrying a mobile home, and we revisit images of the merry-go-round in the backyard of Ray's trailer that we had seen in the beginning of the film. But, while the return to these images implies a circular structure behind the film's overall set-up that is further intensified by a merry-go-round in action, we cannot help but notice clear changes in the film's final scene. While images of orthodox national bor-

ders such as fences, barbed wire, and signposts dominate the initial scene, the end of the film emphasizes images of mobility. Most obvious in this context is the shift from the representation of a static, lifeless merry-go-round to one in motion, filled with life by the young members of a newly emerging patchwork family. When we watch the film's final scene, we encounter an image of a new translocal and trans-ethnic community. While Ray Eddy is in prison serving her sentence for smuggling immigrants across the border, Lila has not only regained custody of her own child but also takes care of Ray's two boys, the older of whom has succeeded in repairing the merry-go-round. The images of mobility refer to the overall theme of migration in the Americas and its global relations, and the image of the patchwork family signifies border crossings between regional and ethnic groups and recalls on a larger scale all migrants from various parts of the world moving to and within the Americas. In his article "Sovereignty without Territoriality: Notes for a Postnational Geography," Arjun Appadurai depicts a social space where migrants and minorities keep flowing into nation-states, challenging the stability of ethnic coherence and legal rights. In Appadurai's description of this world, there is growing pressure to guard the nation-state in territorial terms, while at the same time it becomes increasingly obvious that territory in the sense of regional, ethnic, and national identity is disintegrating into translocality (1996: 40-44). The newly emerging translocal community is similar to mobile patchworks and threatens the dominance of the nation-state. All of the phenomena related to processes of transnational migration have profound repercussions on civil society in all parts of the hemisphere, transforming the way people relate to the imagined local, national, and regional communities and how they construct cultural identities in reference to these horizons of interaction. The construction of new private and public spaces and the production of affirmative or counter-hegemonic identitarian narratives play a key role in defining the processes of political and economic integration of the Americas and the future of the nation-states. They are closely linked to notions of hybridity and heterogeneity, which have all largely challenged the concepts of homogeneous and essentialist national communities in the last decades throughout the Americas.

The final shots of the film show a temporary new patchwork family and the children riding on the recently repaired merry-go-round symbolizing a spatial as well as inter-human mobility, providing hope for new forms of community. While the passing truck with the mobile home at the end of the film suggests that there is no stable home for the new translocal and transethnic family, the scene of the merry-go-round represents one of dissolved borderlines within human interaction without denying the bleak economic conditions that propel much of the spatial mobility in *Frozen River*.

Without giving in to a sentimentalist happy ending, the final scene illustrates that the poverty-ridden and complex contact zones in the U.S.-Canadian borderlands can be filled with human passion and empathy. As the camera traces the merry-go-round's motion, it also provides close-ups of the faces of Ray's oldest son and Lila. We see them expressing gratitude as well as affection. Thus, *Frozen River* captures local transboundary culture, as described by Brunet-Jailly and Alper, but, as I hope the elaboration on Foucault's and Massey's concepts of linked and progressive spaces has shown, it takes the viewer far beyond locality into the realm of psychological, emotional, and social processes of border crossings. Returning to the opening citations from Cosgrove and Ryden, I shall conclude that both Lila and Ray have learned to interpret the borderlands as something beyond landscapes fixed in myth or national discourse. Not only have they crossed multiple borders, but they can finally see these borderlands as a heterotopical space of human interaction.

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